361 of 200 to 300 for the old Mundurucú villages.

The aboriginal Mundurucú village consisted of three to five dwelling places and the men's house, or ehag.* The average population was about 250 people. Commonly, these villages were located on stretches of high savannah. Such a site was easily defensible as its open location protected it from the surprise attacks always used by Amazonian Indians. Also, these locations were relatively free of insects. The [317] Mundurucú say too that "it is beautiful here for you can see far."

362 The houses were oblong with rounded ends and had steeply pitched thatched roofs. Some houses were 80 to 100 feet in length. The eaves of the roofs terminated at about five feet from the ground and the house was closed by vertical bark walls. Doors made of the center stalks of palm fronds were used.

344 The men's house was a large lean-to type building, the open end of which always faced east. It was up to 100 feet long and had a roof that gently sloped from the east end, at which point it was about fifteen to twenty feet high, until it met the ground at the west end. The front and both sides were open. Adjoining the south side of the west end [178] of the men's house was the small room in which the sacred trumpets, forbidden to female eyes, were kept. Three horizontal beams, one in the middle and one on either side of the house, ran from east to west at about five feet above

164 * The phonetic system used above and throughout this work is, with a few exceptions, that of English. The exceptions are: ẽ is pronounced like the German ö; i and u are pronounced as in Portuguese lira and usar, respectively.

11: Murphy E-5 (1952-1953) 1958
SQ13 Mundurucu SQ13

V. MYTHOLOGY AND FOLKLORE

A collection of fifty-eight myths and folktales was recorded in the villages of Missão Velha and Cabruá. The latter community, one of the more conservative savannah settlements, was far more productive of traditional lore of all kinds and most of the material below was gathered there. Although this chapter represents the complete body of oral literature collected in the field, there is undoubtedly more available if a wider range of Munduruú informants were to be sampled. Some myths, such as that of the origin of clans collected by Father Kruse,[1] were specifically sought, but were unknown to those questioned. Munduruú mythology has undoubtedly undergone considerable attenuation, and these may be among the large number of stories no longer extant.

The older Munduruú say that oral literature was formerly much more actively recounted and transmitted. During the evenings, the elders told tales to all the assembled men, and children were brought to listen. These sessions are no longer frequent, but considerable interest is still manifest among the listeners. A number of men and children and usually some women gathered around wherever I found an informant with a story. Indeed, without an audience the narrator would not put forth his best efforts. The delivery was always quite animated and was accompanied by vivid gestures, imitations of animals, and dialogues between the personages in the story. The audience gave full attention, and it was considered most disrespectful to create any diversion during the narration. All laughed readily and spontaneously at the appropriate passages, although many had heard the tale several times before.

The stories themselves range over a variety of subjects and are told for a number of purposes. They have been broken down into six major categories to provide continuity. This does not represent an attempt toward a systematic classification of the myths; actually the categories overlap considerably. For example, the animal tales are generally told for amusement, but they frequently explain the origins of certain species. On the other hand, the Karumakaibó cycle is a true creation myth and is centered upon the activities of the principal culture hero. There are numerous passages in this myth cycle, however, that are considered highly humorous by both narrators and audiences, and in other incidents animals are also created. Similarly, a category of cosmological myths has been included, but there are several events in other tales that are also important to an understanding of Munduruú cosmology.

Through all, there is a running theme of the importance of the animal world to Munduruú society and of the close interrelation between the two. In many tales, animals either have the form of people or are able to take on this form. The mythology does more than explain the origin of animal species, for in almost all cases the various animals are transformed people. That the species had their origin in the human world tends to reinforce the special significance given them in ceremonies and the supernatural belief system.

This affinity between animals and humans will be evident in the saga of

[1] Kruse, 1954, pp. 56-57.